

Message Text

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TAGS: PINS, TS

SUBJECT: FARHAT'S ROLE IN BEJA' SEMINAR

REF: TUNIS 5464

1. SUMMARY: REMOVAL OF GOV OF BEJA FOLLOWING TWO-DAY AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SEMINAR LED TO SPECULATION THAT MIN DEF ABDALLAH FARHAT, WHO PRESIDED OVER THE SECOND DAY OF THE SEMINAR, MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA FOR HIS ROLE IN SEMINAR. WHILE OPPONENTS OF FARHAT MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO USE THIS OCCASION TO LINK FARHAT WITH SUPPORTERS OF AHMED BEN SALAH, IT NOW APPEARS BOURGUIBA HAS BEEN REASSURED THAT FARHAT'S PARTICIPATION IN SEMINAR WAS NOT PART OF ANY MOVE TO REVIVE BEN SALAH'S AGRICULTURAL POLICIES AND THAT FARHAT IS STILL IN PRESIDENT'S GOOD GRACES. THE FORMER GOVERNOR STILL HAS NO NEW ASSIGNMENT BUT ONE MAY BE FOUND SOON.

2. AS REPORTED REF TEL , HEDI BELLAKHOUA WAS REMOVED AS GOV OF BEJA ON SEPTEMBER 15. TERSE PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT INDICATED ONLY THAT "HE HAD BEEN CALLED TO OTHER DUTIES".. THIS IS A EUPHEMISM IN THE GOT FOR REMOVAL FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAUSE. REASON FOR BELLAKHOUA'S REMOVAL ACCORDING TO

EMBASSY SOURCES (REFTEL) WAS HIS RESPONSIBILITY FOR ORGANIZING A SEMINAR IN BEJA FOR FARMING COOPERATIVES IN NORTHERN REGIONS, SEPTEMBER 8-9, WHILE PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA WAS IN ALGIERS FOR NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE. IT ORIGINALLY WAS ANNOUNCED THAT SEMINAR WOULD BE CLOSED BY PSD DIRECTOR MOHAMED SAYAH. HOWEVER, SAYAH REMAINED IN ALGIERS WITH THE TUNISIAN DELEGATION TO THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE. INSTEAD MIN DEF FARHAT PRESIDED OVER FINAL DAY. ON THE DAY BELLAKHOUA WAS REMOVED, FARHAT WAS RECALLED FROM THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE HUNTING SEASON TO SEE PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. ONE SOURCE HAS INDICATED FARHAT WAS QUESTIONED BY BOURGUIBA ABOUT HIS ROLE IN THE COOPERATIVE SEMINAR. IT IS SPECULATED THAT BOURGUIBA WAS NOT INFORMED THE SEMINAR WAS TO BE HELD DURING HIS ABSENCE AND HE MAY HAVE SUSPECTED THIS SEMINAR WAS AN EFFORT BY SUPPORTERS OF AHMED BEN SALAH TO REVIVE THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM IN TUNISIA.

3. IT IS RUMORED THAT BEJA COOP SEMINAR WAS USED BY PERSONS CLOSE TO BOURGUIBA AS AN OCCASION TO TRY TO UNDERMINE FARHAT. THE PEOPLE SUPPOSEDLY BEHIND THIS MOVE WERE MRS. WASSILA BOURGUIBA, SAYAH, BELKHODJA AND FORMIN MASMOUDI, WASSILA HAS BEEN OPPOSED TO FARHAT FOR SOME-TIME AND REPORTEDLY WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN HAVING HIM REMOVED FROM THE PRESIDENCY WHERE HE WAS DIRECTOR OF CABINET FROM 1970 TO 1972. FARHAT'S LOYALTY TO BOURGUIBA HAS NEVER BEEN QUESTIONED WHICH IS ONE REASON HE WAS NAMED MIN DEF. HOWEVER HIS PAST CONNECTION WITH BEN SALAH IS ALSO WELL KNOWN. HE WAS MIN OF AGRICULTURE WHEN BEN SALAH TRIED TO COLLECTIVIZE AGRICULTURE. IN FACT FARHAT WAS MAN ON THE SCENE AT FAMOUS OUARDANINE INCIDENT WHICH MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE COLLECTIVIZATION PROGRAM. FARHAT WAS NEVER IMPLICATED IN BEN SALAH TRIAL PERHAPS IN PART OWING TO FACT THAT FARHAT'S BROTHER WAS THE CHIEF PROSECUTOR IN HIS CAPACITY OF PROCUREUR DO LA REPUBLIQUE (ATTORNEY GENERAL).

4. COMMENT: IF IN FACT FARHAT WAS QUESTIONED BY BOURGUIBA ABOUT HIS ROLE IN BEJA SEMINAR, FACT THAT HE WAS ALLOWED TO MAKE VISIT TO AUSTRIA SEPTEMBER 17-22 WOULD INDICATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HE IS STILL IN PRESIDENT'S GOOD GRACES.
HE MAY EVEN HAVE ASKED FARHAT TO MAKE A DEMARCHE TO CHANCELLOR KREISKY REGARDING BEN SALAH'S CONTINUED ASSOCIATION WITH THE VIENNA INSTITUTE OF WHICH KREISKY IS PRESIDENT. PRESS REPORTS FARHAT WAS RECEIVED BY KREISKY AT THE END OF HIS VISIT.
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